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## **DORGAN, POMEROY TO REVIEW AIRBORNE LASER SYSTEM**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan, along with Congressman Earl Pomeroy and a representative from Senator Kent Conrad's office, will be traveling to Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico on Wednesday to review with Air Force officials the Airborne Laser (ABL) System.

Dorgan, who serves on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee in the Senate, said the ABL is a cutting-edge program designed to protect U.S. troops against short and medium range missiles by using a powerful laser mounted on a Boeing 747. The ABL system would operate at 40,000 feet, above most clouds, where it can acquire and track missiles in boost flight, and then accurately point and fire the laser with such energy that the missile is destroyed before it can do any harm.

"We are talking to the Air Force about the potential of basing the ABL System and its proposed fleet of seven Boeing 747 aircraft in North Dakota," Dorgan said. "No decision has been made at this point and a decision by the Air Force is still some ways off. But this is an opportunity to see a demonstration of the system and personally express our interest in basing the ABL system in North Dakota."

"Our visit to New Mexico this week is part of an ongoing effort to investigate potential new missions for North Dakota," Pomeroy said. "The current Air Force missions in our state will remain essential elements of our national defense for years to come. However, we must also plan for the long-term future. The airborne laser is an exciting new missile defense technology that could be well supported by the top-notch facilities, open air space, and central location you'll find in North Dakota."

If all goes according to plan, the first ABL aircraft will shoot down an actual missile in 2003 and the first three aircraft will become operational in 2007. The Air Force will begin surveying potential home bases for the ABL system next year, and is scheduled to make a final selection in 2004.

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